

Communications Team

401 Fifth Avenue South, Suite 1300
Seattle, WA 98104-1818

206-296-4600 Fax 206-296-0166
TTY Relay: 711

www.kingcounty.gov/health

Frequently Asked Questions — H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)

What is H1N1 flu (swine flu)?

H1N1 virus is an Influenza A virus normally found in pigs. There are many such viruses and they rarely infect humans. The virus currently causing human illness is a new type of swine flu that has developed the ability to infect people and be transmitted from person to person.

Although this new virus is called “swine flu,” it is not transmitted from pigs to humans, or from eating pork products. Like other respiratory diseases, it is spread from person to person through coughs and sneezes. When people cough or sneeze, they spread germs through the air or onto surfaces that other people may touch.

What is Public Health– Seattle & King County doing now?

Public Health is actively working with hospitals and health care providers to promptly identify potential cases of swine flu and to assure that if cases are identified that appropriate treatment and measures to prevent transmission to others are used.

To date, H1N1 influenza in King County is similar to what we would see in typical winter influenza season. However, since it is not possible to predict at this time if the outbreak will worsen or remain mild, Public Health is working to be sure that our community is prepared in case the situation becomes more serious. This includes preparing to activate medical surge capacity to offset potential high demand for services at hospitals and clinics, developing plans in place to distribute antiviral medication, and increasing public education and health promotion.

ILLNESS AND MEDICAL CARE

What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu (swine flu)?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people with H1N1 flu also reported diarrhea and vomiting. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with swine flu infection in people. Similar to seasonal flu, swine flu may make chronic medical conditions worse.

When should I seek medical care?

Use the same judgment you would use during a typical flu season. Do not seek medical care if you are not ill or have mild symptoms for which you would not ordinarily seek medical care. If you have more severe symptoms of fever, cough, sore throat, body aches or are feeling more seriously ill, call your health care provider to discuss your symptoms and if you need to be evaluated.

If the following flu-like symptoms are mild, **medical attention is not typically required.**

- Runny nose or nasal stuffiness
- Low-grade fever for less than 3 days
- Mild headache
- Body aches
- Mild stomach upset

If you get sick with influenza

- If you get sick, Public Health - Seattle & King County strongly recommends that you stay home from work or school so you can get better and keep others from getting sick.
- Also, if you get sick remain at home and avoid contact with others until seven days after your first symptoms began or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.

HEALTH PROTECTION TIPS

What can I do to protect myself and my family?

- Stay informed. Health officials will provide additional information as it becomes available. Visit www.kingcounty.gov/health/h1n1
- Take these everyday steps to protect your health:
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
 - Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
 - **Do not go to work or school if you are sick.** Public Health urges that sick people limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
 - If you don't have one yet, consider developing a family emergency plan as a precaution. This should include storing a supply of extra food, medicines, and other essential supplies. This is to avoid contact with other people as much as possible, including trips to the store. Prepare to get by for at least two weeks on what you have at home.

What should parents do to protect children?

- Keep your child home from school or daycare when sick.
- Teach your children to wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.

- Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of the elbow. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- Teach your children to stay away from people who are sick.
- Follow any emerging public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other protective measures.

Should I wear a mask?

Facemasks (surgical masks) may prevent the wearer from coughing on others, and may protect the nose and mouth of the wearer from contact with other people's coughs. They do not offer complete protection because they do not fit tightly to the face, allowing very small air particles to leak in around the edge of the mask.

Public Health does not recommend the use of masks except for the following people:

- Sick people if they must be near others at home, or if they must leave the home (such as for an appointment with a health care provider).
- Caregivers of a people ill with influenza – when the caregiver leaves their home. This is to prevent spreading flu to others in case the caregiver is in the early stages of infection.

Whenever possible, do not rely on the use of facemasks or respirators alone to provide respiratory protection against novel influenza virus infection. The best way to prevent exposure to influenza is to avoid contact with ill people. Other steps include avoiding crowded setting and washing your hands frequently.

When using facemasks:

- Change masks when they become moist
- Do not leave masks dangling around the neck
- Throw away used masks
- After touching or throwing away a used mask, wash hands or use alcohol sanitizer

Can I go to large gatherings, like concerts and sports events?

To date, the severity of the H1N1 flu outbreak appears to similar to a regular winter flu season. Make decisions about going to large gatherings as you would during a winter flu outbreak. If you want to do everything you can to avoid catching H1N1 flu virus, then avoid large gatherings. It is especially important not to participate in group gatherings if you are ill or have symptoms of influenza.

Should I try to expose myself to the H1N1 virus now in the hope that I will build immunity to H1N1 if it comes back stronger in the fall?

Public Health does not recommend anyone intentionally become infected with influenza. Although most cases of H1N1flu seem similar to seasonal influenza that causes outbreaks in the fall and winter, it is important to remember that each year in the US there are 200,000 hospitalizations and 35,000 deaths from seasonal influenza. Instead of intentionally becoming

infected, Public Health recommends taking precautions to stay healthy and reduce the risk of infection by:

- washing your hands often
- avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- avoiding close contact with sick people

ABOUT H1N1 FLU (SWINE FLU)

Is H1N1 flu virus contagious?

The CDC has determined that this swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. At this time, however, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

How does swine flu spread?

This swine influenza A (H1N1) virus appears to be spreading in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are mostly spread from one person to by coughing or sneezing of an infected person. Sometimes people get infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

How does someone with the flu infect someone else?

Influenza spreads person-to-person mainly through coughing or sneezing of infected people. Infected people may infect others beginning at least one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. You can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

Are there medicines to treat H1N1 flu (swine flu)?

Yes, the antiviral oseltamivir or zanamivir (brand names Tamiflu and Relenza) can treat infection with H1N1 influenza viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of symptoms).

How do I get Tamiflu or Relenza?

Health care providers can prescribe Tamiflu or Relenza after examining a patient and determining that person is sick enough to need the medication. Do not try to buy Tamiflu or Relenza from companies offering the drugs online without a prescription. If your doctor prescribes Tamiflu for you, do not give your medication to anyone else, even if they have the same symptoms as you do. It can be harmful for people to take this medication if their doctor has not prescribed it.

Is there a human vaccine to protect from H1N1 influenza (swine flu)?

There are no existing vaccines that protect against the current H1N1 influenza virus causing illness in humans, but work has begun in developing a vaccine. It is not known whether current human seasonal influenza vaccines can provide any protection.

How long can an infected person spread H1N1 flu (swine flu) to others?

People with swine flu should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possibly for up to seven days after the start of getting sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What about travel to and from Mexico or other states where H1N1 flu had been confirmed?

At this time, CDC recommends that U.S. travelers avoid all nonessential travel to Mexico. Changes to this recommendation will be posted at www.cdc.gov/travel. Please check this site frequently for updates.

Is it safe to eat pork and pork products?

Yes. Swine influenza has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating thoroughly cooked pork or other products derived from pigs.

For more information and on-going updates:

Flu Hotline, 877-903-KING, (877-903-5464), recorded information in English and Spanish about H1N1 flu, 24 hours/day. TTY: 711

Public Health – Seattle & King County, www.kingcounty.gov/health/h1n1

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu

Washington State Department of Health, www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu